

## Shade and Shangri-La Case Study of One of Luis Llenza's Miami Beach Projects

Text by Sallee Wheeler; Naples, Florida

Photography by Myro Rosky; Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

The owners of this residence on a busy urban street in South Florida wanted to expand usable living space to the outdoors. The house faces west, and we contracted to install garden rooms in the front, north and south of a center walkway to the main entrance. An eight-foot-tall ficus hedge, interrupted only by a stylish wooden gate, provides privacy and sound insulation from the street, while a hedge wall to the north and a stucco wall on the south property line clearly defined the outer perimeter of our project space.

Existing plantings surrounding the property included mature pigeon plums and palm trees which created a very shady situation for much of the yard. A fern garden in the south yard failed when the owners removed a large clump of bamboo that had outgrown its space, and the once-dappled light became full sun, frying the ferns. The remaining plants, mostly heliconias and birds of paradise, had grown leggy and were withering.

Our plan was to design a suite of garden rooms for the owners to enjoy year round as extensions of their living areas. Shade gardens, while a challenge, are especially welcome in this tropical climate. They not only add privacy, they cool the environment, enhancing enjoyment of the outdoor lifestyle, especially during the hot, humid summers. Our design added shade-loving plants, such as begonias and alocasias, bromeliads for areas with some sun, and tree ferns to create dappled light. The owners use the north area as a cutting garden, trimming colorful foliage for use in fresh flower arrangements.

South of the center walk, we planted additional Pigeon Plums to increase canopy and privacy. The large leaves of newly planted alocasias further camouflage an existing hot tub at the south end of the house. From there, a trio of new stone steps leads down to the sitting area defined by a floor of stepping stones. Here, a comfortable teak bench and glider provide a cool place to relax. A circular teak table makes casual dining a special event, as guests can enjoy the orchid garden from this area. An eye-catching piece of driftwood becomes an artistic anchor for the profusion of delicate blooms, while ferns and irises carpet the ground areas.

A once problematical shady yard has been transformed from messy to magical. The outdoor areas are now lived in, not just to look at. To appreciate just how usable these gardens are, let's take a closer look.



Plate 2 - In this redesigned garden, the front walkway not only serves as a main traffic artery, it becomes a destination, inviting one to linger for relaxation or meditation. Large, square stepping stones connect the front gate to the front door, their geometric profile and pattern softened by placement of Mexican beach pebbles. We used varying sizes of stones to meander among a border of yellow Walking Irises, Mondo Grass clumps and 'Angel Wing' begonias flaunting their red flowers. Spikes of Sansevieria cylindrica and colorful bromeliads build architectural interest beneath large leaves of the Philodendron 'Rojo Congo', Alocasia macrorrhiza 'Lutea' and Australian Tree Fern. Cap rocks are strategically positioned throughout the garden.

Overhead, graceful palm fronds arch across the walkway, framing views of the front door from one direction, and the gate from the other. Wherever one looks, the scene is lush, tropical and inviting.

Plate 3 - This close-up view of the area in front of the south corner of the house offers a glimpse of the hot tub secluded behind tropical foliage, nature's perfect privacy screen. In the foreground, the large, arrow-shaped leaves of Alocasia macrorrhiza 'Lutea' stretch above bromeliads and 'Angel Wing' Begonias. Next to the Alocasia macrorrhiza 'Lutea', note the smaller leaves of Philodendron 'Rojo Congo' which present a red stem before unfurling to the deep green of the fully open leaf. The soft lilac of an orchid appears at eye level where the plant clings to a tree for tropical accent. The centerpiece of this setting is the large, moss-covered cap rock, nestled among plants, smaller rocks and Mexican beach pebbles. We selected this rock for this spot, then dug a hole and "planted" it as a natural, uncontrived accent melding into the landscape as if it has always been there.





Plate 4 - Standing on the walk where it meets the front steps, the south yard presents an exotic composition with multiple shades of green. The bright green heart-shaped leaves are *Begonia popenoei* which produce a cluster of small white flowers. The well-named fronds of a Fishtail Palm, large, lance-like *Alocasia* leaves, and smaller leaves of *Sansevieria* play out the monochromatic palette in differing hues, shapes and textures. For contrast, the cement gray trunk and pearlescent seed pods of a palm tree add strong linear definition.

Plate 5 - In the north garden, sunlight splashes through the palm canopy to highlight bromeliads, *Alocasia macrorrhiza* 'Lutea', *Sansevieria* 'Moonshine' (right of cap rock), *Sansevieria* 'Whale Fin' (left of cap rock), Australian Tree Ferns, and Mondo Grass. Here, dappled light heightens the sense of movement created by the spill and flow of carefully arranged Mexican beach pebbles.



Plate 6 -This captures the feel of the rainforest with contrasts of light and shadow, sun and shade, heat and refreshing coolness. It breathes; it's beautiful; you wish you were here.



Plate 7 and 11 – We created a pocket of paradise with comfortable seating in the midst of an orchid garden. Closely laid stepping stones form a cool, natural surface that is duplicated in steps leading to the hot tub area. Tropical foliage and Pigeon Plum trees filter sunlight to cool the area. In this perfect environment, delicate orchid plants abound, some finding support on rustic driftwood scavenged from nearby beaches. Understandably, this is the owners' favorite retreat.



Plates 8 and 9 – Close ups capture a spectacular piece of driftwood which seems to embrace the Dendrobium Orchid creating a unique and natural object d'art in this garden oasis.



Plate 10 – Resident cat “Mr. Bunny” emerges from a favorite spot in his Shangri-la haven surrounded by foliage and flowers, including giant Bird of Paradise, Maidenhair and Japanese Ferns, Traveler Palms, Ground Orchids, Dendrobium Orchids, Tropical Irises, Pigeon Plums and lots of mulch for comfortable walking.



Plate 12 – This walkway to the pool continues the style established in the new front gardens, using artful combinations of stepping stones and Mexican beach pebbles, Pigeon Plum trees for height and canopy, and a splash of orchids for tropical beauty and color.